



Surprise, AZ
Silver Star Medal

Sergeant James Witkowski

Sergeant James Witkowski, United States Army, made the ultimate sacrifice by shielding his fellow soldiers from a grenade blast with his body. For that sacrifice, he was posthumously awarded the Silver Star.

In the early morning hours of October 26, 2005, Sgt. Witkowski and 100 soldiers were traveling in a supply convoy from Camp Anaconda near Balad, Iraq, to a forward operating base northeast of Kirkuk. As the line of vehicles slowly maneuvered down a four-lane highway, suddenly, several improvised explosive devices (IEDs) detonated as the soldiers were passing through a small village. Before the dust settled, insurgents hiding behind a sand berm poured down a rain of fire, using small arms and rocket propelled grenades.

As the convoy struggled to make it through the mile-long ambush, Witkowski, who was manning the gun in the turret of a Humvee, kept firing on the attackers. As Witkowski continued firing, he noticed that a grenade had suddenly landed inside his turret. Witkowski had a split second to make a decision: jump out of the vehicle, endangering his unknowing comrades, or shelter the grenade's terrible explosion.

For Witkowski, the choice was simple. Shouting for his fellow soldiers to get down, he covered the grenade with his body, shielding the other soldiers from the blast. Witkowski took the full brunt of the detonation, saving the lives of the three soldiers in the Humvee. Despite being hit with shrapnel, the driver and two other soldiers continued through the ambush, arriving at their destination with only minor injuries.

Thanks to the sacrifice and heroism of Sergeant James Witkowski, all of the soldiers in his Humvee survived the attack that day. For his actions, Witkowski was posthumously awarded the Silver Star on November 21st, 2005.

